

(Washington DC) During testimony before the Senate and House Veteran's Affairs Committees, it was revealed that the theft of the personal data belonging to 26.5 million veterans was discovered through 'office gossip' and not made public for nearly three weeks. Veterans Affairs Inspector General George Opfer testified that he first learned of the theft during a staff meeting on May 10th, 2006. Yet, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) waited until May 22nd before revealing that the Social Security numbers, birthdates and disability ratings of millions of veterans had been stolen. Moreover, in testimony today, Veterans Affairs Secretary Jim Nicholson divulged that Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Gordon Mansfield knew immediately of the burglary of the Veterans Affairs employee's home but did not inform Nicholson until May 16th.

"That the VA waited three weeks before informing veterans and the public is unacceptable," said Congressman Charlie Gonzalez. "Despite not wanting to alert the thieves to the information they had stolen, waiting may have exacerbated the problem. The identities of these veterans could have been stolen and their credit ruined in the interim. Clearly, the VA needs to revamp its security procedures and conduct better oversight of sensitive personal data like this. The men and women who wore our nation's uniform deserve better."

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